

**Cheers to Skip Shenker. The man, the myth, the legend.
The only dad I was lucky enough to have. ... Jessica**

My dad died a week ago, and I've been struggling to put my thoughts into words ever since. I wrote his obituary; but I wanted to share more about what it was like to be his daughter, so here goes:

If you ever met Skip Shenker, you know he was truly one of a kind.

While other dads taught their kids how to swim, my dad dropped baby me in my grandmother's pool because he'd heard that babies intrinsically knew how to swim and wanted to find out if it was true. He always told me that I swam like a fish that day before he retrieved me from the water and narrowly avoided getting murdered by my mom, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

While other dads taught their kids how to drive a car before their driver's test, my dad had me driving a pony on the back roads by our house when I was 5, a golf cart around the farm when I was 7, and my mom's Jeep to my friend Maggie's house on more back roads when I was 12.

Other dads met their kids at the bus stop after school, but my dad would sometimes be waiting there on a horse with his lasso in hand, telling me to run in front of him so he could practice lassoing a moving target.

Other dads took their kids on errands in the car. My dad would tell me to get in his truck, and when I asked where we were going, he'd say, "Up the road." Sometimes, that meant an Amish tack shop a few miles away, sometimes a livestock auction (where I would thank my lucky stars if I remembered to bring a Babysitter's Club book and resign myself to several long and boring hours if I hadn't), sometimes to a knock-off Coney Island restaurant to get his favorite greasy hot dogs, or sometimes to a farm in an entirely different state. .

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Going to horse shows with him as a kid, I watched him talk to everyone and learned how to talk to anyone. How to make people laugh. How to break the rules and make my own fun. How to haggle. How to stand up and be counted. The closest I've ever felt to being a celebrity was when I was introduced to someone at a horse show, and when they realized who my dad was, I'd watch their face light up as they said, "Oh yeah, of course I know Skip!"

He told it like it was, even when it was hard, like when my puppy, Julie, died when I was 9, and he sat me down to relay the news.

When I was a teenager, he rocked out to Whitney Houston with me in his truck on the way to horse shows. He trained my pony and was there in the warm-up ring and on the rail when I showed (sometimes with a few choice words for me that resulted in me saying, "Skipper, if you want to drive this pony, I'll get out of this cart, and you can do it yourself!").

He was there for my high school and college graduations. When I called my parents to tell them that Cory and I had gotten engaged, he said, "Bully for you, kid!" At my wedding, he drove me to the aisle on his golf cart, made me cackle as we walked down it to my husband, and danced with me to "My Girl" during the reception, a song that was in heavy rotation on his truck's CD player on our horse show travels.

I got to tell him and my mom that I was pregnant at the same time and hear both of them cheer and yell, "All right!" He got to spend time with my kid and watch him grow up for a while. And he was just as interesting as a grandfather as he was a dad. Instead of playing with my son, my dad showed him a white pumpkin in the field, taught him to drive a golf cart, and asked him questions like "Much snow up your way?" and if he wanted to go feed the cows. And he was just as impressed with all of his accomplishments and activities as he'd always been with mine.

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Everyone always talks about how sad it is that you do things with your kids for the last time without knowing it, but now I know it's just as painful when it's your parents. One day, I rode on my dad's golf cart with him for the last time and didn't know it.

My mom, son, and I went to Waffle House with my dad during a visit a few months ago. And I didn't know it then, but after hundreds (maybe even thousands?) of meals out at horse shows and on other random days, that was the last time I'd go out to eat with him.

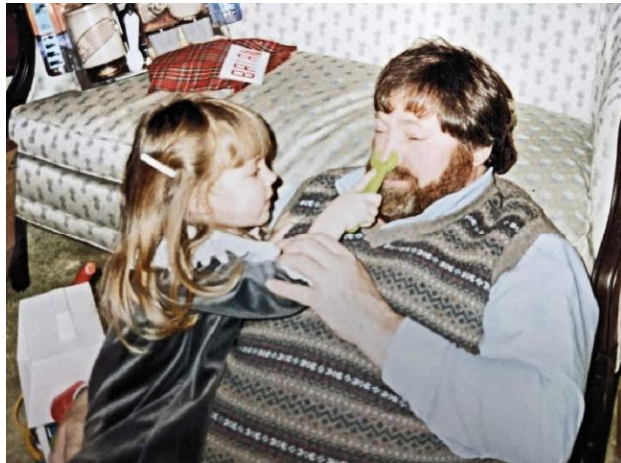
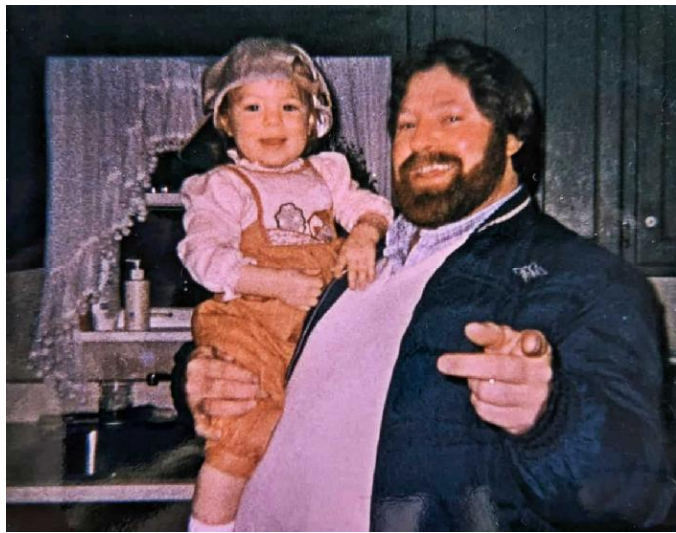
During my very last visit, I told him that I couldn't have imagined having a cooler dad and that they broke the mold with him. (To which he replied, "Well, good, cause I'm the only one you've got!") And when I walked out the door, I didn't know that would be the last time I saw him.

I can't believe I'll never get to make him laugh again or be able to call him to settle a dispute, like whether a live chicken or an Amish-made broom costs more (Cory said the chicken, I said the broom, and I was right!), or ask him a random question like if he'd ever ridden a bull (which, of course, he had). Or tell him what I haggled for at a garage sale, got for a steal at an auction, or the latest thing his grandson is up to.

He told me a long time ago that he'd still be around as a breeze in the trees after he died. And I know that he's also still around in other ways. As the character in so many stories told by so many people. As a part of me and as a part of my son.

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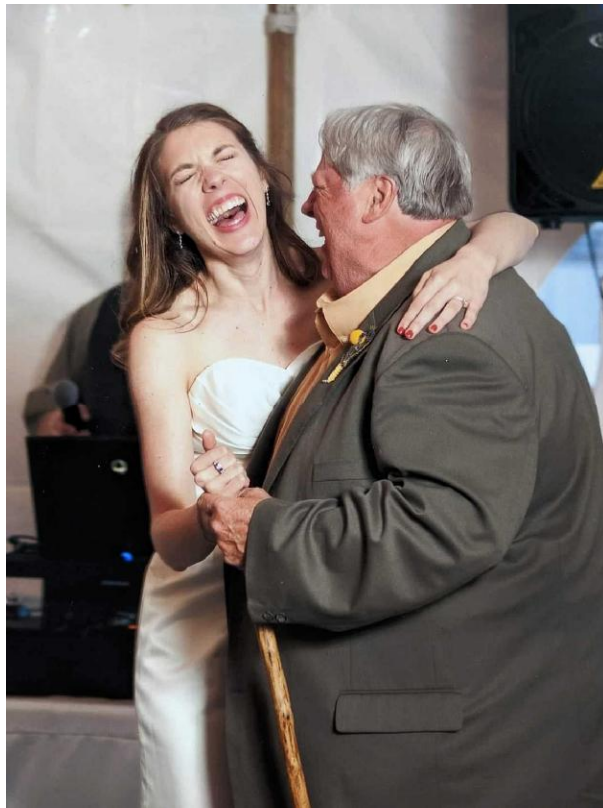
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Obituary link:

<https://www.rosesimplicity.com/obituaries/richard-skip-shenker>